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## COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Winter DMME Announces Alert Campaign 2001**

**Big Stone Gap, VA** – State mine safety inspectors will meet with coal miners on all shifts at active mining operations in Southwest Virginia's coalfields during October and November to review and reinforce important cold weather safety precautions. Changing weather from October through March – the "Winter Alert" period – can dramatically affect conditions on coal mine sites, particularly underground mines. These changes can increase the potential for mine fires and explosions.

"The recent fatal coal mine explosion in Alabama serves as a reminder that disaster can happen when certain conditions and events coincide," said Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy Division of Mines Chief Frank Linkous. "Although events leading to that tragic accident may or may not have been weather related, the conditions for the explosion to occur – an explosive level of methane and an ignition source – are the same as those that must be vigilantly watched for during the Winter Alert season."

Dramatic changes in atmospheric pressure during the Winter Alert period have been linked to the increased release of methane by coal seams in underground mines. Cold, dry fall and winter weather also causes the mines to dry out, making the control of coal dust an even greater challenge than during other times of the year. Proper mine ventilation, the application of rock dust to suppress coal dust, regular monitoring for methane and other gases and the elimination of potential ignition sources keep these dangerous conditions from occurring.

"Complacency poses a serious threat to management and workers in any heavy industry," Linkous said. "That's why we believe these "Walk and Talk" safety visits are so important. Safety talks

are a regular component of state mine inspections, but they become even more important during the Winter Alert season, giving us the opportunity to review and emphasize the critical nature of key safety precautions, good communications and mine-specific history and conditions.”

Mine inspectors will post Winter Alert information at each surface and underground coal mine. Information about each individual mine’s compliance history in critical areas related to Winter Alert precautions will be discussed with mine management and employees. These precautions include roof control, ventilation, permissibility, and rock dusting in underground mines; and highwall stability and safe operation and maintenance of haulage and other mobile equipment on surface mines. Historical information concerning the release of methane in each underground mine is also included. Other precautions to be discussed will include the following:

### **Underground Coal Mines**

- Importance of examinations of work and travel areas by certified persons.
- Maintaining adequate mine ventilation and checking for methane.
- Knowing the mine ventilation plan and communicating changing mine conditions.
- Proper maintenance and ventilation of abandoned areas to remove dangerous gases.
- Controlling coal dust.
- Frequent visual and sound checks of mine roof.
- Never traveling under unsupported roof.
- Knowing escape ways and mine emergency procedures.
- Making regular checks to prevent smoking articles from being taken underground.

### **Surface Coal Mines**

- Using caution and maintaining adequate clearance when working near overhead electrical lines.
- Freezing and thawing affect highwall stability. Watching for loose and falling rocks near highwalls.
- Frost, ice, snow and mud on steps and catwalks increase slip and fall hazards.
- Keeping mobile equipment windshields free of frost, ice, snow and mud to ensure clear line of vision.
- Icy and muddy conditions increase braking time and distance for heavy equipment.
- Equipment operators should always wear seatbelts.
- Conducting thorough pre-operational checks of mobile equipment.

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